

Iran, in 6-Year Search for Arms, Finds World of Willing Suppliers

By ELAINE SCIOLINO
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 24 — During its six-year war with Iraq, Iran has bought more than \$9 billion in arms from America's allies and enemies alike, according to a high-ranking Reagan Administration official.

Other officials and independent arms analysts say that while North Korea and China are Iran's most important arms suppliers, Western countries provide about 20 percent of the Teheran Government's purchases.

U.S. 'Opened the Floodgates'

These sources contend that recent disclosures of American arms shipments to Iran through Israel will make it impossible for the Administration to stem the flow of arms to Iran by allies of the United States.

"We seem to have opened the floodgates for our allies to sell arms to Iran," an Administration official said. "I have the sense countries will be rushing to Teheran to make offers and clinch deals."

Late last month, for example, an Iranian negotiating team went to Britain apparently to get parts for Chieftain tanks and Scorpion armored cars, according to American and British officials. They said the parts were provided for in contracts concluded under the Shah's reign with International Military Sales, an arms company owned by the British Defense Ministry.

Land-Rover Deal Discussed

Last week, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told Parliament that "a very small quantity" of what she called non-lethal equipment had been delivered to Iran as a result of these talks, without specifying what had been shipped.

British officials also confirmed last week that they were negotiating a \$37.8 million deal to send 3,000 Land-Rovers to Iran. The vehicles presumably could be converted for military use.

In a hearing today before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Assistant

Secretary of State Richard W. Murphy said that North Korea was Iran's primary arms supplier and that China and Eastern Europe also supplied weapons. He said he was unable to confirm whether France and Portugal had sent weapons to Iran.

Iran has shown considerable imagination in scouring the world for weapons and spare parts, from providing foreign visitors with lists of arms it wants to using its diplomats and exiles abroad as arms procurers.

In the last two years, Iran's leaders, seeking to improve the country's image abroad and win support for its war policy, have traveled extensively. Just after Hojatolislam Hashemi Rafsanjani, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, negotiated a deal in Libya to secure Soviet-made Scud missiles in June 1985, for example, he flew to Damascus to help arrange the release of 39 Americans taken hostage in the hijacking of a Trans World Airlines plane.

The Task of Tracking Arms

But the murky, often secret nature of arms dealing makes it impossible to determine precisely what Iran spends on arms and where it spends it.

"The Iranians know how to play games," said Gary G. Sick, a member of the National Security Council in the Carter Administration and author of a recent book on Iran. "They've cut deals through private channels and with governments that don't acknowledge them, which makes arms tracking very difficult."

The American-Israeli link to Iran shows that Iran will buy from anyone. And despite an official American arms embargo and a worldwide campaign to prevent allies from shipping arms, large amounts of weapons have reached Teheran from the United States and its allies through government licensees and unofficial channels.

From 1979 to 1983, the only years for which reliable American intelligence figures are available, Iran spent \$2.8 billion on major arms purchases from the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, West Germany, Italy, China, Rumania and Poland, and \$2.6 billion in arms through other nations and indirect sources. Intelligence analysts concede this is a partial list.

An Increased Flow Is Seen

Since unannounced American negotiations with Iranian factions began last year, several Western countries are believed to have allowed more arms and spare parts to flow to Iran.

In the last year, Israel has become the major supplier of modern American-made parts to Iran, although the exact size of the shipments cannot be measured, according to independent arms analysts.

France, one of Iraq's largest suppliers, has acknowledged that French-made antitank missiles and large amounts of 150-millimeter ammunition have made their way to Iran since last year, although French officials denied any involvement. The shipments were so large, however, that independent arms experts say the French Government must have known of them.

Some of these sources say they believe that arms constituted at least part of the \$330 million that France recently gave Iran as partial repayment of a \$1 billion loan extended under the Shah.

Portuguese state-run factories produce large quantities of ammunition and mortar shells that have been sold to Iran, an Administration official said. "Despite our protests, officials look the other way," an official said.

From time to time, the Italian authorities have allowed spare parts for Hawk missiles and for helicopters to reach Iran, the official added. Iran has also received transports and small boats from Japan; tents and trucks from India; armored cars, rocket launchers and large amounts of hand grenades from Brazil; artillery and ammunition from South Africa; Fokker aircraft and military electronics equipment from the Netherlands; Chieftain tank parts from Britain, and F-4 and F-5 parts, overcoats and uniforms from South Korea.

Switzerland has operated either as a third-party broker or a direct supplier of parts for European-made weapons, according to arms experts.

"Very often people who control exports of arms are intelligence officers who keep things from their governments," said Anthony Cordesman, a

vice president of the defense research arm of the Eaton Corporation and an authority on the Iran-Iraq war. "These countries are turning a blind eye."

American officials say they believe that North Korea alone has sent Iran more than \$1 billion in weapons, including tanks, artillery pieces, antiaircraft guns, mortars, rifles and other guns.

While China is believed by American intelligence officials and arms analysts to have signed a \$1.6 billion arms deal with Iran that includes F-7 fighter planes, artillery, tanks and armored personnel carriers, it is unclear what has actually been delivered.

Arms From Libya and Syria

The same sources say Libya and Syria, Iran's only Middle Eastern allies, have made significant arms shipments in the last three years, including Soviet-made tanks, Katyusha artillery rockets, SAM-7 missiles, antiaircraft guns, antitank missiles, artillery shells and a small number of armored personnel carriers.

The Soviet Union, Iraq's largest arms supplier, has increased its shipments to Iran through Czechoslovakia, which has sent chemical warfare equipment, light arms and ammunition, and through Poland, which has sent antiaircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades and parts for armored equipment and heavy weapons, the sources say.

American-made weapons and parts are still the most crucial component of Iran's arms systems, arms experts say. "With the American arms shipments, the genie is out of the bottle," Mr. Cordesman said. "No one can tell how many of the American systems will now be operational or predict what this shift of high technology will mean."